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THE DARK ROSALEEN.

BY HENRY W. NEVINSON.

THERE is in Ireland an intention of putting up a memorial to Clarence Mangan, if only money enough can be collected. Whether, in the present state of art, a monument is of any advantage to the world, and whether poets who boast of work more durable than bronze had not better be satisfied with that kind of durability—these are questions for artists. But there can be no doubt that, if any country ought to put up memorials to its poets, Ireland owes one to Clarence Mangan.

He was one of those peculiar plants of genius that produce only one perfect flower. He gave every promise of a poet, it is true. The sketch of him taken by Sir Frederick Burton as he lay dead in a Dublin hospital (whether he died of cholera or starvation is a nice point for discussion) shows a clear-cut face of great refinement and sensitiveness—a face like Schiller's, and having something in common with the faces of all lyric poets. We read of the brilliant and dreamy blue eyes, of the hair so abundant and so bright with gold before misery whitened it. His very dress was lyrical. The accounts left by his few friends, Gavan Duffy among them, all agree upon the steeple-crowned hat with its immense brim, the tightly-buttoned coat that had once been a kind of drab, the little blue cloak, hardly reaching to the waist, the baggy trousers made for someone better fed, and the enormous umbrella which he kept tucked under the cloak so that it looked like a bag-pipe.

The apparition is poetic enough, and it seems never to have varied, except that under opium and drink it grew rather more spectral and dingy, till suddenly it vanished underground. In external circumstance also, Mangan enjoyed every poetic advantage. He was born poor and remained so; he was well-read; he was un-

married; and he lived to forty-six. Nor was his genius hindered by lethargy, or indifference, or any over-scrupulous criticism of himself. He was, on the contrary, rather peculiarly fertile, and Mr. D. J. O'Donoghue, to whom we owe the new edition of his writings, as well as the biography published a few years ago, has discovered over 800 of his poems that appeared in print. So far from being barren, all his work shows the facility and exuberance of a man who writes with ease, and enjoys writing. There was nothing exiguous or stinted about him, and yet, though he was quite unaware of it himself, he reached high excellence only once.

His devoted admirers, of whom I am one, may bring up strong instances to the contrary. They may call to mind poems still familiar to the literary circle in Dublin, such as "O'Hussey's Ode to the Maguire," with its fine ending, so prophetic of De Wet:

"Hugh marched forth to the fight—I grieved to see him so depart;
And lo! to-night he wanders frozen, rain-drenched, sad, betrayed—
But the memory of the lime-white mansions his right hand hath laid
In ashes warms the hero's heart!"

Or they may call to mind the lament that, like the wood-pigeon, keeps asking, "Where, Oh, Kincora?" or the Turkish song of "Karaman," or the Arabic "Howling Song of Al-Mohara," or the personal sorrow of "The Nameless One":

"Him grant a grave to, ye pitying noble,
Deep in your bosoms! There let him dwell!
He, too, had tears for all souls in trouble,
Here and in hell."

Or they may call to mind the regret for the days of the "Barmecides," so productive of Irish parody; or the more genuine pathos of "Twenty Golden Years Ago," not unlike one of Béranger's smiling lamentations over lost youth:

"Wifeless, friendless, flagonless, alone,
Not quite bookless, though, unless I choose,
Left with nought to do, except to groan,
Not a soul to woo, except the Muse—
O! this, this is hard for *me* to bear,
Me, who whilom lived so much *en haut*,
Me, who broke hearts like chinaware
Twenty golden years ago."

I will go further than other admirers, and add the "Lullaby," in which the rod of Moses, the diamond sceptre of Pan, and the Golden Fleece are mingled, in true Irish prodigality, with the glaive of O'Dunn, Diarmid's sword, and Queen Eofa's jewels, as the best possible gifts to keep the baby quiet:

"And Conal's unpierceable shirt of mail,
And the shield of Nish, the prince of the Gael,
These twain for thee, my babe, shall I win,
With the flashing spears of Achilles and Finn,
Each high as a pine;
O, hushaby, hushaby, child of mine!"

For such poems as these, Mangan would be remembered, as he is remembered, in any circle that made a special study of Ireland's literary spirit. Owing to that "Celtic Revival" which has been the one spiritual event of the last ten years, it is quite likely that some of them may appear in our recognized anthologies, and the name of Mangan will become familiar to the English child as one of poor, slovenly, drunken and incapable old Ireland's awful warnings.

By most people, even by admirers, the rest of Mangan's work will never be heard of again. Like all the Irish poets of his time, Mangan was much hampered, even in the use of words. They were writing a foreign language, and working on false models. For they had forgotten their own tongue, and the true power of English was hidden from them by the poetic artifice of their day. Take Mangan on his ordinary level, as in "The Geraldine's Daughter":

"A beauty all stainless, a pearl of a maiden,
Has plunged me in trouble, and wounded my heart;
With sorrow and gloom is my soul overladen,
An anguish is there that will never depart.

Any Irishman of sixty years ago could have gone on like that to the other side of Godspeed. And to me—perhaps to me alone—there is a certain attraction about that kind of verse, the attraction of a genuine, though slightly faded, gentility. It reminds me of the modest little houses which are still seen in the sweetly mouldering suburbs of Dublin, bearing on their gate-posts of corroded stucco the titles of "Talavera," "Khyber Pass," or

"Maharajpore," to recall the poor, battered, old hero who so trustfully served the foreign and dominant race, and inscribed those proud titles as his sufficient reward. Over such gate-posts, such verses, the sensibility of forty years ago would have shed a tear; and still the angels give them a smile of passing recognition.

But in "The Dark Rosaleen" we have no time to think about forms and words. Critics may tell us there are echoes of a foreigner's English in it still. That does not matter now. The dawdlers in the suburbs of literature may drowse over such things if they please. They may debate with tepid industry whether it was Mangan or Poe who first invented the obvious characteristics of the metre. In "The Dark Rosaleen" we have passed beyond such things. We are borne away to a circle of passion from which tasteful criticism is seen fluttering with all its trumpery in the Paradise of Fools. The winds and stars are round us, and "red lightning lightens through the blood." We have passed into a world of nobler vision, where we behold Ireland incarnate again under the symbol of the Black Little Rose—the *Roisin Dubh*—just as she once appeared to Costello of Ballyhaunis, Red Hugh O'Donnell's wandering singer, who first made that song of such finely woven duplicity that the dull invaders never could be quite sure whether it sang of treason or of love. That early singer, in peril of his life, had said:

"Oh, little rose,

"Let there not be sorrow upon you for what has happened;

"The priests are coming over the waves, they are moving upon the sea.

"Your pardon will come from the Pope of Rome in the East,

"And Spanish wine will not be spared for my Dark Little Rose."*

It was from that verse that Mangan began:

"O my Dark Rosaleen,

Do not sigh, do not weep!

The priests are on the ocean green,

They march along the deep.

There's wine from the royal Pope

Upon the ocean green;

And Spanish ale shall give you hope,

My Dark Rosaleen!

My own Rosaleen!

* Slightly altered from Miss Guiney's translation of the Irish in her "Study of Mangan" (1897).

Shall glad your heart, shall give you hope,
 Shall give you health, and help, and hope,
 My Dark Rosaleen."

The Gaelic poet, whose name is a shadow, went on:

"It was a long course over which I brought you from yesterday to this day.

Over mountains I went with you, and by sails across the sea,
 The Erne I passed at a bound, though it was great with flood,
 And there was music of strings on each side of me and my *Roisin Dubh*."

Then Mangan sings:

"Over hills and through dales
 Have I roamed for your sake;
 All yesterday I sailed with sails
 On river and on lake.
 The Erne at its highest flood
 I dashed across unseen,
 For there was lightning in my blood,
 My Dark Rosaleen!
 My own Rosaleen!
 Oh! there was lightning in my blood,
 Red lightning lightened through my blood,
 My Dark Rosaleen!"

Intermingling the note of human love as though to lead the insensate enemy astray, Costello sings:

"I would walk the dew with you and the desert of the plains,
 In the hope to win love from you, or part of my desire.
 Sweet little mouth! you promised you have love for me.
 Oh, she is the flower of Munster,
 My Dark Little Rose!"

But from a further depth of passion comes Mangan's cry, and the ruler must be dull indeed to miss the rebel's devotion here:

"Over dews, over sands,
 Will I fly for your weal:
 Your holy delicate white hands
 Shall girdle me with steel."

The figure of a country rises like a religious vision before some soldier-saint in a ruined chapel of the forest or among Irish hills. She is the Black Rose, the Secret Rose, holy as the Rose of Bethle-

hem. The poet is enamored of her, as ancient citizens were enamored of a city, but it is with a passion how much more tender and profound! She is no imperial state, standing in white-columned security over the seas which her fleets command; but a sly and fugitive spirit, her beauty remains unseen by all except her worshippers. To strange eyes she looks a mournful and profitless thing. Full of sad memories, reviled and held up to derision, bound, tortured, and spat upon, called out to make sport with her wit, starved and driven through the earth, in turn half-strangled and cajoled as a pleasing strain for the nurseries of her tormentors, even to her lovers she takes the disguise of the Little Old Woman, the Kathleen na Houlihan, who sits uncomfited beside the world's highway, or crouches muttering over the peat-fires of her hearth, while under those worn rags, and under the disguise of that wrinkled skin, is hidden the pure form of that Dark Rose whose heart is the consecrated shrine of joy and sorrow:

“ All day long, in unrest,
 To and fro do I move.
 The very soul within my breast
 Is wasted for you, love!
 The heart in my bosom faints
 To think of you, my queen,
 My life of life, my saint of saints,
 My Dark Rosaleen!
 My own Rosaleen!
 To hear your sweet and sad complaints,
 My life, my love, my saint of saints,
 My Dark Rosaleen!”

The poem first appeared in “The Nation,” the rebel newspaper of “Young Ireland.” It was in 1846, perhaps the blackest year in the unbroken storm of Ireland's history since the Invasion. It may have been for that very reason that the “Dark Rosaleen” so far surpassed anything else that Mangan ever wrote. In the Introduction which John Mitchel, himself one of the greatest writers in “The Nation,” prefixed to the selection from Mangan's poems which was published ten years after his death, we find a sentence which, perhaps, explains why it is that this poem stands alone and apart, as something in an utterly different rank of excellence, from the rest of Mangan's work. Mitchel speaks first of the poet's poverty-stricken and miserable life, of his shy and sensi-

tive nature; "modestly craving nothing in the world but celestial, glorified life, seraphic love, and a throne among the immortal gods"; and then, as an explanation of his entire neglect by English critics, he adds:

"Mangan was not only an Irishman,—not only an Irish papist,—not only an Irish papist rebel;—but throughout his whole literary life of twenty years he never deigned to attorn to English criticism, never published a line in any English periodical, or through any English bookseller, never seemed to be aware that there was a British public to please. He was a rebel politically, and a rebel intellectually and spiritually,—a rebel with his whole heart and soul against the whole British spirit of the age."

It was because Mangan found in "The Dark Rosaleen" the fullest expression of that lifelong rebellion that the poem is on quite a different level to the rest of his work. In this alone he passed beyond the ordinary themes and exercises of poetic talent—the amorous addresses, the regrets for the past, the translations from foreign tongues, over which he wasted so much of his life. In nearly all his other verses, he is untrue to himself and only plays the common literary part. They are sometimes pretty, sometimes "literature," and they are never anything greater. But here he gathers up all the deepest forces of his nature, to give us, just for this once, the assurance of something more than a literary man. In this cry of rebellion, prompted by a devotion like a lover's, but more generous and of nobler mood, we find at last the essential spirit of the poet. He was a rebel with his whole heart and soul, says John Mitchel. And his rebellion was inspired by the vision of that sorrowful but endearing shape which was his country—that beggar queen, starving and glorified—that saint of saints, whose spirit shone in gleams of opal. Like himself, she was abused, ruined, and despised, but the light that burned in her heart, burned in his as well. So to her feet he brought his one great gift, and there he uttered the words which expressed the whole purpose of his scorned and distracted life:

"But yet will I rear your throne
Again in golden sheen;
'Tis you shall reign, shall reign alone,
My Dark Rosaleen!
My own Rosaleen!

'Tis you shall have the golden throne,
'Tis you shall reign, and reign alone,
My Dark Rosaleen!

The Judgment Hour must first be nigh
Ere you can fade, ere you can die,
My Dark Rosaleen!"

The "British spirit," against which Mangan was a rebel, heart and soul, now calls this kind of passionate emotion "mere sentiment." That word "sentiment" has a history of some interest. It has seen better days. Once it was used to describe all the higher emotions; and, indeed, it has much the same meaning still, only that once it was used in praise, and now it is invariably used in scorn. I have watched the use of the word by our politicians, leader-writers, and business men for the last ten years, and I find that when they set something aside as "mere sentiment," they really mean that it cannot produce sixpence. The Bishop of Worcester, it is true, lately protested that even "sentiment" cannot always be safely disregarded, but he has not changed the use of the word. To describe a thing as "mere sentiment" is to assume it to be a natural object of indifference or contempt; and because no one was ever sixpence the better for any of the higher emotions, they are all included under the ban of the same word.

Since the British spirit inevitably, therefore, regards Mangan's passionate devotion as mere sentiment (for it never could produce sixpence), it is worth while to discover what that spirit thinks the natural and advantageous attitude towards the object of his adoration would be. And let us take the British spirit at its very best, as it is represented, for instance, every week by a newspaper which is the source of true culture to the thoughtful middle classes, and is by them justly regarded as moderate and reasonable in its judgments, besides being capable of forgiveness towards our defeated opponents, and of sympathetic tenderness to the lower animals. Such a newspaper certainly reveals the British spirit in the most intellectual and benevolent form, and it is in a spirit of exuberant benevolence that it comments as follows upon some visit of the King to Ireland:

"The Celtic Irish have never, owing to their want of minerals, been able to share fully in the solid wealth of Britain. Their island, though beautiful, has never attracted the sportsman and the tourist, who every

year carry so large an income to the happy kingdom north of the Tweed, where even the foibles of the people are just the foibles Englishmen comprehend, and therefore forgive. . . .

"Much of all this it is impossible to alter, as impossible as to change a pasture into a mine by merely desiring the alteration; but something can be done which is worth doing. The Court can visit Ireland. . . .

"Crowds will flock where the King has found it pleasant to live, crowds whose wealth, if it does not exactly fertilize as a new trade would, still produces variety, excitement, a break in that melancholy monotony of which the Irishman through all his literature is so apt to complain, as one of the evils to which he is unjustly subjected."*

I wish the writer had explained exactly where in Irish literature he found the Irishman so apt to complain of that melancholy monotony. He says it is everywhere, and I suppose he must have instances by the score, all unknown to myself. But everyone will admit that in this passage we do find the British spirit in benevolent, healthy, and fullblown perfection. By this spirit we are taught to see a country's greatest happiness in coal-pits and iron foundries, or, failing them, in rich visitors who will convert the peasantry into gamekeepers, gillies, and caddies. And, next to pits or parasites, this exponent of the British spirit likes to see a Court, which he regards as a thing to be desired, not from any devotion to a noble line, or as an ideal of kingship, or as a symbol of respect for some great ruler, but because it would attract crowds "whose wealth, if it did not exactly fertilize as a new trade would, still produces variety, excitement, a break in that melancholy monotony"—and so on. Variety, excitement, and a break—these are the nearest approach to spiritual blessings which this typical writer can imagine; and even these, though the products of wealth, are only a kind of second-best, for the wealth of crowds attending the Court "does not exactly fertilize as a new trade would."

We have come a long way from Mangan's "Dark Rosaleen." We have come the immeasurable breadth of St. George's Channel. We have crossed to the sphere of the British spirit, and, from this English shore, the Dark Rosaleen certainly does look a little un-lucrative. She is less fertilizing even than a Court, much less than a new trade. No one was ever sixpence the better on her account, except the police. How different things appear in this happy land, where there is always a tourist or a golfer in sight, if

* *The Spectator*: July 25, 1903.

there is not a mine nor a factory! Here we see a real Court, and "crowds will flock where the King has found it pleasant to live." Here new trades fertilize on every side, and from ten thousand chimneys the clouds drop fatness. Here Comfort builds her shrine, and the law of the Golden Mean prevails, banishing the falsehood of extremes, and pointing to the example of our City Fathers to prove the desirability of "broadening slowly down." Here the wayward child of passionate devotion is suffocated at birth, and a "non-committal attitude" succeeds to all the wealth of prudential reservations. Here is the home of common sense; here the land of that British spirit against which Mangan was a rebel, heart and soul.

No one would deny the great advantages of such a spirit. To be sure, it is exposed to the drawback that, as a recent writer on English education has said, "common sense has never yet furnished motive powers for great objects,"* and great objects have counted for something in the world's history. But, apart from great objects, the British spirit can always pride itself with justice upon its sanity, its caution, its accomplishment of definite purposes by small degrees, its substantial prosperity, and entire freedom from the inexplicable sorrows and passions that rock the soul. These are blessings that Mangan never knew; they are beyond the reach of the Dark Rosaleen's worshippers, and probably he never realized how soothing is their influence upon the mind. Had he done so, he might have been tempted to abandon his rebellion, to make terms with the invader, and to seek the rewards which the British spirit undoubtedly can bestow upon its own children, and on all who follow its precepts.

That is the temptation to which we are all exposed. We all feel the attraction of the British spirit, and the blessings of Golden Mediocrity are very tangible. We like its definite aims, its general cheerfulness, its visible sweeps. It is not always that we can remain, like Mangan, rebels against it, heart and soul, and preserve an unshaken fealty to that Dark Rosaleen who is the Ireland of the spirit. Yet we know for certain that in all great enterprises—in the arts, love, war, and every important affair of life—the only part that counts is the part that exceeds moderation; the part that is sometimes called "passion" and sometimes "sentiment," that disregards worldly interests, has no personal aims, and sets no

* Mrs. Emily Crawford in "Victoria, Queen and Ruler."

limits to its desire, admiration, or rage. "Prudence," said William Blake, "is a rich, ugly old maid, courted by Incapacity," and all who would remain true, like Mangan, to the Dark Queen of the soul must leave those wooers to the mediocre progeny likely to fill their well-appointed nurseries, while they themselves pursue the road into the austere land of excess. An austere land we may call it, for passion burns up all pretty adornments and signs of ease, so that, where she passes, the country is bare as a desert. But through it the adventurous road leads to the world's end, where laws shrivel up, and duty vanishes like an ineffectual ghost.

Men of any nation may thus become champions of the Dark Rose. For every soul is a disunited Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, nor is spiritual success to be won except by persistent rebellion against that predominant partner, which is the commonplace. When John Mitchel identified this partner with the British spirit, he was, perhaps, unnecessarily harsh. There is no need to bring the British spirit into the question at all, since, as we know from Goethe, the commonplace is always endeavoring to lay the bonds of its dominion on every one among us.

HENRY W. NEVINSON.